

# Shoshone National Forest Plan revision Cooperating agencies meeting

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*March 13-14, 2013*

*Pronghorn Lodge, Lander, WY*

## **Attendees**

*State of Wyoming:* Jessica Crowder (Wyoming Department of Agriculture), Mark Conrad (Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality - Water Quality Division), Rick Huber (Wyoming Game and Fish Department-Cheyenne), Kevin Johnson (Wyoming Game and Fish Department-Lander), Ron McKinney (Wyoming State Trails), Josh Milek (Wyoming State Trails), Rebekah Fitzgerald (natural resource policy analyst), Judy Wolf (conference line-Wyoming State Historical Preservation Office)

*Conservation Districts:* Clara Mae Yetter (Meeteetse Conservation District), Steve Jones (Meeteetse Conservation District), Steffen Cornell (Meeteetse Conservation District), Tim Wilson (Popo Agie Conservation District), Kristin Tilley (Shoshone Conservation District), Rich Olson (Hot Springs Conservation District)

*County Commissions:* Stephanie Kessler (Fremont County), Doug Thompson (Fremont County), Loren Grosskopf (Park County), Joe Tilden (Park County)

*Shoshone Cooperating Agency Coalition consultant:* Gregory Kennett (Ecosystem Research Group)

*Forest Service:* Carrie Christman (planning staff-Shoshone National Forest), Joe Alexander (forest supervisor-Shoshone National Forest), Steve Schacht (district ranger-Washakie Ranger District), Bryan Armel (resource staff-Shoshone National Forest)

*Audience:* Sandy Tinsley (Senator Enzi), Ryan McConnaughey (Representative Lummis), Kim Wilbert, Mac Davenport, Charles Drimal (Greater Yellowstone Coalition)

## **Welcome and purpose of the meeting**

- Draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) and draft plan were published toward the end of July 2012, followed by the comment period (which ended November 26, 2012). The interdisciplinary team (IDT) is working on responding to comments
- The purpose of today's meeting is to discuss the bigger issues brought forth in the comments
- The oil and gas meeting with the Governor's office and cooperating agencies three weeks ago was productive. At today's meeting, we will talk about resolving the issues
- Regional office will have the final decision and has been supportive of the Shoshone's proposals so far.
- Today we will give insights as to how the Shoshone will resolve issues from the comments generated. In some cases, the resolution will be to stick with what is in the draft forest plan and DEIS. The Shoshone's goal is to work with cooperating agencies on the topics they would like to discuss

## DEIS and draft forest plan comment summary

### *See handout on comments summary*

- 23,475 comment letters were received on the DEIS and draft forest plan during the comment period
- A team has been working to extract “concern statements” from the comment letters
- Summarized comments will be ready for release in a couple of months. Responses will be published in the final EIS. Comment letters can be shared via CD

### Grazing

- Some cooperators expressed concerns about the suitability analysis stating the analysis did not consider steep ground (as other region 2 forests did)
  - This is the case because most are cattle, not sheep, allotments
  - The Shoshone will redo the analysis to follow region 2 criteria due to comments of concern. This should not change the analysis results, but how we look at the overall picture.
    - Individuals would like to see region 2 criteria and the Shoshone’s criteria summarized
  - Request to emphasize that the suitability analysis is just a model

### Timber and forest health

- Comments were made that the plan does not adequately address the impacts that climate change will have on vegetation and disturbances. Comments are referring to conditions that will exist 50 to 60 years from now. This is a 10-15 year plan. We are not planning for events 50 years from now. The DEIS did address the possibility of those future changes. There is no certainty on how quickly things will change. We have used information from the last 10 years to project what will happen in the next 10 to 15. That projection is as accurate as we can get and is consistent with the information from the climate change work that was done for the Shoshone. No change will be made to scope of analysis.
- Insect and fire disturbances: the Shoshone has started new inventory where the bugs have been more on the north than the south end of the forest
  - Inventory has been updated 50-60 percent. Wherever there has been a fire, data has been updated.
  - There was an issue with the fuels layer not being updated; however, that data will be updated for the FEIS analysis. This will not change the objective on the ground.
  - Governor is interested in beefing up the fire suppression language and costs associated with possible increases in wildfire activity. We think that the last 10 years of wildfire activity is a good predictor of the next 10 years
- Fire vs. mechanical treatment: There is a perception that the Shoshone is favoring wildfire as a tool over mechanical treatment or prescribed burning of vegetation
  - The Shoshone is trying to show the areas managed versus wildfire use where we are limited in what we can do. The Shoshone will relook at those comments and determine how the language can be clarified
  - Wildfire is not the first tool of choice
    - In new state law, there are new revised invasive aquatic organism regulations that may affect fire suppression, equipment, and transported water
      - Fire Staff Officer Mark Giacoletto will incorporate this information

- Park County suggested a separate forest health alternative. Need to review language and direction for salvage opportunities
- Temporary roads in inventoried roadless areas: there are some exemptions to utilizing temporary roads in roadless but not for timber harvesting
  - Some concern was raised over exemptions to temporary roads. The Forest will review the exemptions available under the 2001 Roadless Rule

### Oil and gas suitability

- The changes the Shoshone is proposing to surface occupancy are the most significant changes from the draft plan to the final plan
  - The Shoshone is proposing these changes based on the discussions at the February 8, 2013 Governor's office meeting on oil and gas in Thermopolis
  - The Shoshone is waiting to see final comments from the Governor's office
  - Received comments from the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone tribes regarding concerns about proposed surface occupancy on lands adjoining the Wind River reservation
- Winter range and oil and gas leasing
  - Park County stated that they still have quite a few differences with the Governor's office proposal for surface occupancy
    - Joe would like to see the comments Park County sent to the Governor's office
    - Rebekah stated the Governor had not reviewed the surface occupancy issue yet but should by week's end
  - The Shoshone will take into account and try to be as transparent as possible when working with the recommendations from the state on winter range
  - Meeteetse Conservation District wants to preserve the opportunity for the oil and gas industry for possible future demand
  - Consistency with BLM lands: many comments stated we are not in alignment with the BLM regarding surface occupancy. The proposal from the Governor's office would make our proposal consistent with the BLM for oil and gas leasing surface occupancy
  - The draft plan is not clear on differences between exploration and development
    - The no surface occupancy designation does not apply to exploration. The language will be clarified

### Wilderness and special area designations

- Wilderness recommendation: comments and specific letters highlighted the Dunoir Special Management Unit and mountain bike use in that area. Many people want to see the Dunoir proposed for wilderness designation. No concerns were brought forward about eliminating snowmobiling in Dunoir.
  - In conversation with Joe Alexander, Senator Alan Simpson provided insight into the drafting of the 1984 wilderness bill stating that the legislators felt that Dunoir was not suitable for wilderness designation.
  - Most discussion regarding mountain biking is on the current use on one specific trail (12 miles, with only 6 miles going through the western portion of the Dunoir).
  - The Shoshone did not restrict mountain biking in the previous plan. Mountain biking and chainsaw use are the two issues to address in the Dunoir. We are trying to be consistent with the intent of the enabling legislation. The Regional forester will make the decision as to whether any areas are proposed for wilderness designation.
- Sawtooth Peatbeds Special Interest Area and Morrison Jeep Trail: Comment requested that the plan establish a separate management area for the Morrison Jeep Trail where it passes through

the SIA. We will address the concern by making it clear in the management area direction that the Morrison Jeep Trail does not impact the purposes for which the SIA was designated and that designation of the SIA will not require the road to be closed to motorized traffic

- Kirwin Special Interest Area: comments were all positive, suggestions to expand and include the Double D Ranch. Our existing boundary does not include all the historic sites there. We will take a look at the suggested expansion boundary
- Beartooth Butte Research Natural Area and snowmobiling: comments expressed concerns over pulling the boundary back to the Wilderness except for the very top of the butte. Very little use on the top of the butte so no real concern.
- Additional comments on wilderness: comments were pretty much split. The Governor is not supportive of recommending any additional wilderness for designation at this time.

### Other topics

- Changes to revision topics: Additional topics brought up during scoping have been addressed in the draft plan
- Range of alternatives: There was concern expressed that we did not complete an economic benchmark analysis. We will complete this analysis. Comments reflected comfort with the range of alternatives that we have
- Travel management during revision: Region 2 has a policy of not doing travel management concurrently with forest planning. After the plan is completed, we will start on travel management and will address scope, scale, timeline, county, community, or ranger district. A county by county travel management analysis was suggested by Fremont County
- We intend to subdivide Management Area 3.5 (back country recreation and forest restoration within inventoried roadless areas) into four subdivisions: winter motorized, winter non-motorized, summer motorized, and summer non-motorized. This should help clarify our management intent for these areas.
- The DEIS portrayal of snowmobile use in Alternative A vs. B received a lot of comments. Wherever there are changes from the winter motorized use status of the 1986 plan, we will provide a rationale. If it is not winter range and we are closing it, there will be a resource reason provided. This will go to the forest leadership team to see how they want to address it.
  - Need to make sure we are talking crucial winter range. Crucial winter range and the Dunoir are the major changes regarding winter motorized use between these two alternatives. Two Oceans (300 acres) issue was brought up.
    - Joe highlighted the (2/13) meeting in Dubois on Two Oceans. A meeting for the skiers was held in Lander on 3/12. The conflict is between the skiers and the snowmobilers. Joe feels this is a local issue, under the draft plan direction both uses can occur. The plan is not the tool to settle the issue. Joe is committed to help both sides come up with a solution.
- Expansion of summer motorized opportunities: primary conservation area for grizzly bears is the major constraint. We need to clarify that we will have the option to modify existing routes while still protecting existing habitat. New maps for both summer and winter motorized opportunities will be available at the next cooperating agencies meeting

### Wildlife

- Conflicts exist between grizzly bears and livestock both inside and outside the Primary Conservation Area (PCA). PCA direction does not address conflicts outside of the PCA.
  - The State suggested that the plan direction align more closely with the PCA direction. They would like to see a language change regarding working with the permittee to resolve the issues outside of the PCA, instead of looking at closing the allotment or

- utilizing a long time rest of the allotment. Suggests changing the guideline listed in the plan.
  - Meeteetse Conservation District expressed concerns heard from the ranching community. Rancher may be willing to give up that permit with another rancher willing to take that loss
  - Joe stated he cannot change the conservation strategy
  - The State emphasized they are not requesting a change to the strategy but how we implement the strategy relative to the forest plan
- Lynx habitat mapping – the concern is that we should be redoing the lynx mapping similar to the Bridger-Teton and Gallatin. We did redo our lynx mapping in 2005-2006. From our standpoint, we redid it according to the most recent direction.
- Lynx plan direction – there is a conservation strategy for the lynx and there are amendments still in place. We are just pulling that into the forest plan and implementing it as it is. How we portray this in regard to the Canadian lynx strategy will be reviewed
- Wolverine potential listing – does not change what we are proposing in the plan, it will change the language. We had no direction for wolverine because it was not listed yet, however, it sounded like we had some direction in the plan. The Shoshone is going to have to add something to the plan stating there are no anticipated changes to management activities; the risk to the wolverine is due to climate change and lack of snow
- Management indicator species – ruffed grouse - Joe Harper is looking at the comments. We still have grouse listed as an indicator but needs to be discussed further

### Social and economic

- Community level economic analysis – comments were that the economic impacts did not address impacts at the community level
  - Communities around the Shoshone are affected in diverse ways by management of the Shoshone
  - Analysis of potential impacts of each resource-dependent industry is presented to the detail allowed by available data and information
  - Whether impacts associated with each alternative actually occur depend on many variables – some within FS control such as where and how timber harvest or grazing permits and other activities occur, and some outside FS control, such as which companies bid for contracts, where wood processing occurs, and what happens to timber and beef prices. Such uncertainties are one reason why it is difficult to predict the effects of a programmatic plan on individual communities.
  - FS activities provide economic opportunities to the private sector; how that sector and various industries respond depend on many variable in addition to FS management. To attempt to assign potential impacts directly to one community or another would require assuming knowledge of how each community and each industry will react and complete and succeed under each alternative. We can talk about the qualitative aspect and we do plan to beef up some of this but we are not going to address the quantitative aspect.
- Costs of fire suppression – wildfire management costs will be added to the fire management analysis in the EIS
- Economic analysis of grazing – Tex Taylor’s grazing analysis contained three different levels of grazing economic benefit. The higher projections consider what may happen to the ranching operation if they lose their base property on the Shoshone. We selected the alternative that we felt was closest to our direct inputs – grazing AUMs. Selecting the impact that accounts for the

role of the AUMs with the ranch economy is also valid and we agree it is a good thing to do. This will produce a relative difference between alternatives.

- Economic analysis of oil and gas development – there was a concern that we didn't include the potential values of oil and gas development. Given the low probability of development and the fact we currently have no development we did not include this in economic analysis. They say we are not considering lost future opportunity cost. The only opportunity cost to lose is the small development that is projected to occur and since all alternatives maintain some acres open where development could occur the opportunity is not lost. The qualitative discussion does imply that there is less of a chance it would occur in Alternative C, but there is no way to evaluate this quantitatively. We will look at our analysis and may modify some wording. Bottom line is there no future opportunity cost to evaluate across the alternatives.
- Projecting changes to economic impacts in by varied recreational use opportunities - Request to portray how recreation use and recreation economic impacts will change across the alternatives if the acres available for a motorized activity are increased.
  - We have no numbers or research to allow us to make these kinds of projections. We talk about some of this qualitatively and they presented some documentation that we may be able to incorporate into the document on the relative difference between uses. Opportunities to further explore qualitative and quantitative analysis for recreation opportunities and use will be discussed with Tex Taylor and Julie Schaefers.
- Assumptions on future budget levels – concern that our plan did not address future budget levels, expected declines and how the alternatives would be affected. Because our funding levels can vary by program area, we do not know what the effect of declining budgets will be. All alternatives would be similarly impacted
- Present net value benchmark analysis –takes a look at the maximum output of a particular commodity minus the cost. We will complete this analysis.

#### Public comments

- Concern that individual input does not mean much
- Feels Forest and cooperating agencies should allow more public input to the process

*Closing: Joe felt like it was a productive day for the Forest. He does not hear contention or disagreement in moving forward although we still have issues to work through. He appreciates the diligence and feels we will have a good product in the end. Important topics for tomorrow are the steering committee and what happens after this. Response to comments will be published in the final DEIS. There is not a cooperating agencies meeting scheduled for the last week in March. Final DEIS will be published at the end of October.*

#### Thursday, March 14, 2013

#### Local government plans

- The Forest has completed an analysis of the interrelated impacts of the draft plan and the land use plans of the three counties and seven conservation districts
  - The purpose of the analysis is to identify any conflicts in management direction between plans and propose possible resolution to these conflicts
- Goals for the plans of local agencies focused largely on land management through multiple use; promoting sustainable livestock, timber and mineral industries and forest health, air and water quality. Goals from the local agencies plans were similar or shared to those goals in the draft plan. Overall comparison of these resource management plans shows general agreement on

practices and priorities and no intractable differences in goals. SCAC requested that the analysis be completed but did not bring forward any conflicts in goals between the draft forest plan and the plans of local governments.

### **Expectations of the cooperating agencies moving forward**

- Between now and October – another meeting to work through what was covered in last two days (more narrowly focused)
- Expectations are that the cooperators will see the FEIS before the public does
- Governor’s office would like to see the response to comments sooner with a meeting to go over those comments
  - Joe sees difficulty in the timeline of this meeting but will try to accommodate. Joe will try to accommodate a two to three week review of the documents before the official release – could respond to critical changes only
  - Joe would like to give the Governor the opportunity for a consistency review (not required by FS regulations) – runs parallel with the 60 day objection period (after the publication of the FEIS)

### **Next meeting**

May 9 (and 10<sup>th</sup> if needed) in Cody. Agenda: temporary roads in roadless, explore exemptions. Forest health, salvage, new products (expand language); oil and gas leasing; Dunoir SMU regarding mountain bike use; Sawtooth peatbeds SIA-request to exclude the road; Pat O’Hara and Arrow Mountain RNAs; travel management - Beartooth regarding snowmobiling; Kirwin SIA; share new winter and summer motorized use maps; grizzly-livestock conflicts – language; qualitative/quantitative discussion and language for recreation use

### **Questions for follow-up**

- Trails program long range plan - was that looked at? Bryan will check
- Motorized signing guide (FS): will that be attached? Josh Milek will send Bryan an email
- Winter/summer maps: detail of the Dunoir boundary requested
- Forest plan steering committee: this committee will be convened after the publication of the record of decision and the initiation of implementation of the new plan. Joe envisions the committee as cooperator based with public attendance, focusing on what the emphasis and priorities are in implementing the new plan. Joe will come up with a proposal for the next meeting on the makeup of the committee.